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DE RUEHKI #1101/01 1911115
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4340
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001101

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN ITURI BECOMING INCREASINGLY VOLATILE

REF: A. KINSHASA 1068

1B. KINSHASA 1091

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: Since the June 30 capture of Tcheli in southern Ituri District by the Patriotic Force of Resistance in Ituri (FRPI), militia activity has increased markedly in the area south of Bunia. The renewed fighting has led to the desertion of several villages and towns just outside Bunia and a significant wave of IDPs arriving in Ituri's main city. The security situation has deteriorated to such a point that even NGO activities have been severely curtailed in the region. Some soldiers from the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) who fled the fighting in Tcheli, meanwhile, have begun preying on local populations, further adding to the region's volatility. End summary.

INSECURITY HALTS HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

12. (C) Following the seizure of Tcheli by militia forces June 30 (ref A), much of southern Ituri District -- primarily Irumu territory, south of Bunia -- has become increasingly volatile. The security situation has become so pronounced that MONUC Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahboob Haider Khan has recommended the immediate suspension of humanitarian operations until the region is stabilized. NGO contacts in Bunia report that the main road between Bunia and Komanda (approximately 35 miles southwest of Bunia) is too dangerous travel, as militia members now control many sections of that route. Consequently, a main east-west axis towards Kisangani has effectively been shut down, and many NGOs have suspended their operations and closed offices in Irumu territory.

13. (SBU) The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported July 6 that an estimated 6,000 IDPs have fled towards Bunia to escape fighting south of the city. According to OCHA officials, several thousand IDPs have taken temporary shelter in a church on the outskirts of Bunia. OCHA is currently planning to establish a new IDP camp in the village of Dele, about three miles south of Bunia. The World Food Program is expected to provide food rations, while UNICEF is planning to provide non-food assistance. MONUC officials, however, said they are worried that the large influx of IDPs into Bunia may cause unnecessary security problems immediately before the July 30 elections.

NO MILITARY RESPONSE SOON

¶4. (C) FARDC officials said they are still planning a military response to retake Tcheli, although no date has been set for such an operation. MONUC Chief Military Information Officer Lt. Col. Mike Burke said the MONUC Eastern Division Commander General Patrick Cammaert, has instructed General Mahboob to draw up plans as well for a military operation in Tcheli. Burke said, however, that Cammaert told Mahboob to wait until after July 30 to begin his operations.

FIGHTING AND HARASSMENT CONTINUES

¶5. (C) Meanwhile, fighting has continued between various militias, MONUC peacekeepers and the FARDC in Irumu territory. On July 1, a MONUC patrol encountered heavy fire from militia forces near Aveba (about 19 miles south of Bunia). The MONUC Bangladeshi peacekeepers were required to call in air support from attack helicopters, which fired some two dozen rockets on a suspected force of 80 militia members. MONUC military observers reported that on July 3, the entire village of Kaya (9 miles southwest of Bunia) was deserted -- and 15 homes burned to the ground -- following an attack by the FRPI. The same day, FARDC troops were fired upon by other FRPI militia members at Kombokabo (15 miles southwest of Bunia), which was captured later in the day by the militia. Two FARDC soldiers reportedly died in the firefight at Kombokabo. In the nearby location of Avi Heights, a joint MONUC-FARDC operation on July 3 resulted in the confirmed deaths of 16 militia members; several others were reportedly wounded in the operation.

¶6. (C) On July 6, a MONUC helicopter was fired upon by suspected FRPI forces while flying over the Songolo area

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(about 11 miles south of Bunia). The helicopter, which had been dropping leaflets as part of a civic education campaign for the demobilization program, sustained five bullet hits, according to MONUC reports. One of the bullets penetrated the fuselage and injured the co-pilot. The flight was immediately discontinued and the co-pilot was flown to the MONUC hospital in Bunia. MONUC reports that the weapons that hit the helicopter did not appear to have come from small weapons fire.

¶7. (C) The renewed fighting south of Bunia has resulted in the abandoning of several small towns and villages. MONUC military observers report that the locations of Makabo, Chai, Lingabo and Tinda -- all within 5 miles of Bunia itself -- have been deserted. On July 4, the village of Kombokabo was discovered to have been destroyed and burned by the militia forces which had seized it the day before.

¶8. (C) The Congolese military has contributed as well to the growing instability in Ituri District. After the fall of Tcheli, many FARDC troops (along with their families) fled north towards Bunia, Marabo and Songolo, among other locations. Consequently, morale and discipline among some Congolese forces -- already low -- deteriorated further, resulting in a new wave of exactions and harassment against the local population. MONUC military officials said a small group of FARDC soldiers in Marabo (approximately 17 miles southwest of Bunia) threatened to kill any Congolese person working for MONUC and verbally harassed MONUC peacekeepers, accusing MONUC of supporting the militias. NGO sources in Bunia said some Congolese soldiers have been stealing food from civilians in Marabo and Nyakunde (about 19 miles southwest of Bunia). MONUC officials said they have received reports of FARDC troops stealing voter identification cards (and demanding payment for their return) and equipment from the local hospital in Nyakunde.

PROBLEMS GROWING NORTH OF BUNIA AS WELL

¶9. (C) The overall security situation is further exacerbated by the large number of recently-surrendered militia members who have responded to a new disarmament deadline. As reported ref B, because of the inability of CONADER (the Congolese disarmament agency) to provide services to ex-combatants, demobilized militia members are becoming increasingly agitated, with several riots having been narrowly averted. As the fighting in Irumu territory continues, however, the number of surrendering militia members will likely decrease, and those not provided for by CONADER may well return to their militias.

¶10. (C) Militia activity has also reportedly increased north of Bunia as well. FARDC Major Ferdinand Kashanga, the company commander at Djugu, said militia members from the Front for National Integration (FNI) have been spotted moving closer towards FARDC positions in Djugu. Kashanga told MONUC officials that Peter Karim had also been regrouping his forces near Nioka, but the strength of that force was unknown. Kashanga added that even though the FARDC was conducting frequent patrols in the area, his troops have reportedly received orders not to fight against the militias unless they are fired upon first. FARDC commanders in Bunia were not immediately available to verify that such an order exists.

COMMENT: THE NEED FOR REFORM

¶11. (C) Comment: As is so often the case in Ituri, the security situation can change quickly. Despite the relative calm which seemed to prevail after the FARDC captured Tcheli in June, the militias were still apparently active and regrouping. It is unclear just how long this current wave of fighting will last, but it has created serious security concerns just before the country's July 30 elections. Once again, the events in Ituri demonstrate the absolute need for military reform and the creation of a capable, competent and independent Congolese army. End comment.

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